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New GAO Report Commends Saudi Arabia's Efforts to Fight Terrorism and Terror Financing

WASHINGTON [September 30, 2009] – In a report released on September 29, 2009, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) commended the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its ongoing efforts to fight domestic and regional terrorism, along with its implementation of strict regulations to prevent funds from reaching terrorist organizations and its programs to combat the spread of extremist ideologies.

“The GAO’s report is an affirmation of Saudi Arabia’s commitment to combating terrorism and terror financing throughout the globe,” said Saudi Ambassador to the United States Adel A. Al-Jubeir.

In the report’s cover letter to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and House Foreign Relations Committee Chairman and Ranking Member, Rep. Howard Berman and Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the GAO restates the central partnership the U.S. has with the Kingdom on counterterrorism, adding that Saudi Arabia is also essential to “achieving security in Iraq, advancing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and ensuring stability in world oil markets.”

The GAO enumerates several areas in which Saudi Arabia has succeeded over the past eight years, detailing multiple initiatives, including the Kingdom’s public awareness program, its extremist rehabilitation program and the repeated public condemnations of terrorism by senior government and religious officials, including Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz and Saudi Arabia’s Grand Mufti.

According to the GAO, the office conducted its analysis because “...the U.S. government considers the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia a vital partner in combating terrorism.”

To read the full report, click here.

Excerpts from the GAO Report on Saudi Arabia's Efforts to Fight Terrorism and Terror Financing

On General Counter-Terrorism Activities

In its introductory remarks, the GAO reports that the State Department has “assessed progress related to its goal of building an active U.S.-Saudi antiterrorist coalition as ‘on

target'." It also states that U.S. and Saudi officials report progress in enhancing the Saudi government's ability to combat terrorists, and note that the Saudi government's efforts have "disrupted Al-Qaeda's terrorist network within Saudi Arabia.

- "U.S. and Saudi officials also report progress on efforts to prevent financial support to extremists, citing, for example, the Saudi government's regulations on sending charitable contributions overseas, and the arrest and prosecution of individuals providing support to terrorism."
- "With regard to preventing financial support to extremists, U.S. and Saudi officials also report progress, citing, among other examples, the Saudi government's implementation of cash courier regulations, ban on the transfer of charitable funds outside the Kingdom without government approval, and arrest and prosecution of individuals providing ideological or financial support to terrorism."

On Efforts to Combat Terror Financing: 2003-2005

- "Al Qaeda's attacks against Saudi and U.S. citizens in Saudi Arabia in 2003 and 2004 marked a turning point in the Saudi government's efforts to combat terrorism and terrorism financing..." and that "...Between 2003 and 2005, the Saudi government reported that it took a number of actions to combat terrorism and terrorism financing within the Kingdom, some with U.S. assistance, such as increasing the size, training, and professionalism of Saudi security forces."
- The report also commends the Kingdom for its decision to work with the U.S. on designating the Al-Haramain Foundation as a "financier of terrorism" according to UN Security Council Resolution 1267.

On Agency-to-Agency Training Cooperation

- As for Saudi Arabia's commitment to providing its security forces with training and technical support, the GAO report states: "Since 2005, several U.S. agencies have conducted training and provided technical assistance to improve the capacity of the Saudi government to combat terrorism and its financing."
- "U.S. agencies involved in these efforts include the Department of Defense, Department of Energy, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice, State and Treasury, as well as the intelligence community."

On the Arrest, Capture and Prosecution of Suspects

- "Officials from State report that there have been no successful terrorist strikes in Saudi Arabia since February 2007. Officials attributed this outcome, in part, to Saudi law enforcement actions."

- “Between 2003 and 2008, U.S. and Saudi officials report the Saudi government arrested or killed thousands of terrorism suspects, including those suspected of planning attacks on Saudi oil fields and other vital installations. Further, the Saudi government has published three “most wanted” lists, and U.S. and Saudi sources report Saudi Arabia has captured or killed a number of suspects on these lists. In 2008, the Saudi government announced terrorism trials for approximately 1,000 individuals indicted on various terrorism-related charges. In July 2009, the Saudi government announced that 330 suspects had court trials, of whom seven were acquitted and the rest received jail terms ranging from a few months to 30 years.”
- “Apart from joint training courses, U.S. officials told us they have close working-level relationships with their Saudi counterparts and noted that Saudi security cooperation is significant.”

On the Public Condemnations of Extremism

- “Saudi government and religious leaders have publicly condemned terrorism and terrorism financing. Several high-ranking Saudi government leaders have spoken out against terrorism and extremism. In his remarks at the UN’s Culture of Peace conference in November 2008, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz noted that ‘terrorism and criminality are the enemies of every religion and every culture.’
- “Moreover, religious leaders, such as the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, have issued a number of statements critical of terrorism. In the spring of 2008, the Grand Mufti issued a statement on the evils of terrorism and warned Saudi citizens not to listen to those who use religion to promote terrorism.”

On Saudi Efforts to Combat Extremism

- “According to U.S. and Saudi officials, the Saudi government has implemented an extensive media campaign against extremist thought. State reports this campaign includes the use of advertisements, billboards, text messages and the Internet.”
- “Officials from the Saudi Ministries of Islamic Affairs and Interior told us Saudi Arabia had produced a variety of books and pamphlets designed to combat extremist ideology. Saudi officials estimate that approximately 1.8 million books have been prepared as part of this effort.”
- “According to State reporting and Saudi officials, the Saudi government continues to monitor the preaching and writings of religious leaders, and to reeducate those who advocate extremist messages. Saudi officials from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs told us their monitoring has covered approximately 20,000 of Saudi Arabia’s estimated 70,000 mosques, including all of the large mosques that hold Friday prayers.”

- “According to officials from the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs, the Saudi government monitors for school teachers who teach extremism. Once identified, such teachers are put through reeducation programs.”

On Saudi Efforts to Combat Terror Financing

- According to the report, “In 2005, the government of Saudi Arabia established the Saudi Financial Investigation Unit, which acts as Saudi Arabia’s financial intelligence unit (FIU). Located in the Ministry of Interior, the Saudi FIU receives and analyzes suspicious transaction reports and other information from a variety of sources, such as banking institutions, insurance companies, and government departments.”
- “According to U.S. officials and State reporting in 2007 and 2008, the Saudi government has taken legal action against terrorist financiers, based on its laws and regulations related to combating terrorist financing. In 2003, the Saudi Arabian government enacted an anti-money laundering law, which provided a statutory basis for considering money laundering and terrorism financing as criminal offenses.”

On the Regulation of Charitable Giving

- “In rules dated December 2008, the government of Saudi Arabia updated its banking regulations to include specific language related to multilateral organizations, including Muslim World League, IIRO, and World Assembly of Muslim Youth. The rules state that transfers from the accounts of these multilateral organizations to any party outside of the Kingdom shall not be allowed without approval from SAMA (Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency), and that any contributions approved for transfer may only be used in ways as specified by SAMA.”
- The State Department also acknowledges, according to the report, that in September 2008, Saudi government controls were further tightened on charitable giving.

The report concludes by reiterating its strong support for Saudi efforts, stating “that the government of Saudi Arabia is pursuing terrorism financiers and cooperating with the United States to counter terrorism financing.... Since 2005, several targets to assess progress of the U.S. government’s counterterrorism and antiterrorism financing collaboration with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have been met.”

To read the full report, click [here](#).

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